

## OBITUARY

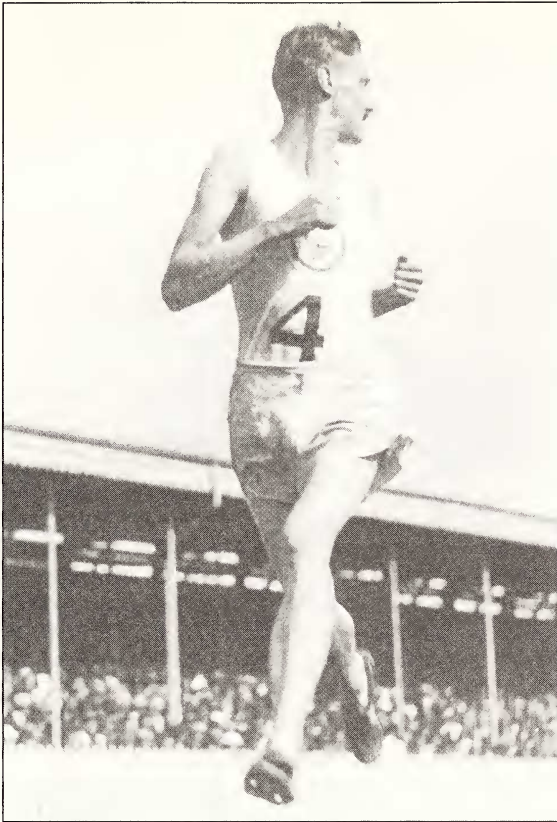
### Robert Mervyn Craske, 1909–2001

Robert Mervyn Craske was born in 1909 and died on 4 May 2001. A brave and modest winner of the Military Cross, successful Empire Championship long-distance runner, and practical joker, Craske was a remarkable, utterly charming, and quirky man of military bearing who positively loved butterflies; he was also the most famous and successful variety hunter to ever live in Sussex. He was the last of the line of a family of collectors, which commenced with his great grandfather during the 1840s. Robert was an intelligent, enterprising, resourceful, and investigative collector who, after a long spell spent working for the Bank of England before the Second World War, became a peacetime dealer in antiques and thus had the time to devote to his passion. He started collecting both moths and butterflies, but from the early 1930s onwards exclusively focused on the rarest and most extreme butterfly aberrations. Renowned for his indefatigability—and as a shameless flatterer—Craske worked Shoreham Bank to exhaustion from between the wars, when he was one of the lucky few to have knowledge of the site, until into the 1990s. All of the Bank's finest forms of *coridon* (chalkhill blue) fell to his net. He was also just as successful scouring Abbot's Wood for *euphrosyne* and *selene* (pearl-bordered and small pearl-bordered



Robert Mervyn Craske: January 2001

photo: ©Richard Revels



Empire Games, Christchurch, New Zealand. March 1935. Running the 2 miles, time 9 mins 27 s.

fritillaries) during the great upsurge of small-sized fritillaries after the Second World War. Here too he obtained the most extreme melanic and ground-colour forms. The pinnacle of Craske's collecting career came in 1948 when he discovered a hitherto undescribed form of *galathea* (marbled white). After another quarter of a century's clandestine searching, sufficient specimens and information had finally been gathered for the form to be called ab. *craskei* Tubbs.

The quality and quantity of his incredible collection of personally-caught extreme aberrations—mainly taken in our county—will never be equalled again by one man in Sussex. A great, but quiet philanthropist, and utterly addicted to collecting, Craske sold (see below) this significant contribution to science to the Natural History Museum in 1970. He enjoyed a prodigious memory and an unrivalled eye for an ab. up until the end, and, even in his 92nd year, his life remained daily steeped in lepidopterological lore.

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